

Fire Extinguishers

Tips for using Portable Fire Extinguishers

Portable fire extinguishers were designed to save property by putting out a small fire or containing it until the fire department arrives. Contact your local fire department for information about fire extinguisher classes in your area. If you are unable to take a class, there are some important guidelines you should know.

1 The Fire Emergency

Knowing what to do in the event of a fire is extremely important before using a fire extinguisher.

- Read the instructions and know how to use the extinguisher before the emergency.
- Make sure everyone is leaving the home or building.
- Ensure the fire department has been called.
- Make sure the fire is confined to a small area and is not spreading.
- Be sure you have an unobstructed escape route to which the fire will not spread.
- **If the fire does not begin to go out immediately, leave the area at once.**

2 Extinguisher Types

Make sure the extinguisher matches the type of fire you are fighting. Extinguishers that contain water cannot be used on grease or electrical fires. Most portable extinguishers discharge completely in as few as eight seconds. Make sure the extinguisher is large enough to put out the fire. There are three basic classes of fires:

Class A: Ordinary combustibles such as wood, cloth, papers, rubber, and many plastics.

Class B: Flammable liquids such as gasoline, oil, grease, tar, oil-based paint, lacquer and flammable gas.

Class C: Energize electrical equipment including wiring, fuse boxes, circuit breakers, and machinery and appliances.

Many fire extinguishers are “multi-purpose” A-B-C models, labeled for use on all three classes of fire.

3 Using a Fire Extinguisher

Keep your back to an exit and stand six to eight feet away from the fire. Follow the four-step **PASS** procedure.

- **PULL** the pin: This unlocks the lever and allows the extinguisher to discharge. Some extinguishers may have other seals or tamper indicators.
- **AIM** low: Point the extinguisher nozzle (or hose) at the base of the fire.
- **SQUEEZE** the lever above the handle: This discharges the extinguishing agent. Releasing the lever will stop the discharge. Some extinguishers have a button instead of a lever.
- **SWEEP** from side to side: Moving carefully toward the fire, aim the extinguisher at the base of the fire and sweep back and forth until the flames appear to be out. Watch the fire area. If the fire re-ignites, repeat the process.

Extinguishers should be installed in plain view, above the reach of children, near an escape route, and away from stoves and heating appliances. Make sure the extinguisher is within easy reach, in working order and fully charged. Read the operator’s manual to learn how to inspect the extinguisher. Follow manufacturer’s instructions for installation, maintenance and use.

Knowing what to do to save life and property in the event of fire may be the most important protection you can provide. Learn how to use your fire extinguisher before an emergency occurs. A balanced home fire protection plan should include installing and maintaining smoke alarms, making and practicing a home escape plan and calling 911.

To dispose of an expired fire extinguisher, contact your local fire department, sanitation department or a fire extinguisher service company. Local laws regarding disposal of fire extinguishers may vary.

References: United States Fire Administration on line at: www.usfa.fema.gov; Home Safety Council, *How and When to use a Fire Extinguisher*, http://www.homesafetycouncil.org/safety_guide/sg_fire_w009.aspx